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Claims

1. A method of establishing an audio call path between an Internet user accessing a web site and an agent of the web site, such method comprising the steps of:

proving a web site with a plurality of audio access icons and a plurality of agent groups;

associating an agent group of the plurality of agent groups with a subject matter of each audio-access icon of the web site; and

establishing a voice path between the user and an agent of the associated agent group based upon activation of a audio-access icon by the user.

- 2. The method as in claim 1 further comprising providing a plurality of informational web pages for access by the user.
- 3. The method as in claim 2 further comprising disposing an audio access icon of the plurality of audio access icons on at least some web pages of the plurality of informational web pages.

The method as in claim 1 wherein the step of associating an agent group with each icon further comprises correlating a training level of an agent group of the plurality of agent groups with an information content of an audio-access icon of the at least some web pages.

- 5. The method as in claim 1 wherein the step of establishing an call path between the user and an agent of the associated agent group based upon activation of a audio-access icon further comprises placing the user in a call queue of the associated
- 5 group until a next available agent becomes available.

- 1 The method as in claim 5 further comprising measuring a time 2 period that the user has been in the call queue.
- The method \as in claim 6 further comprising comparing the 1 2 measured time with a threshold value and overflowing the user to 3 a queue of another agent group when the measured time exceeds the threshold. 4
- 1 8. The method as in claim 1 further comprising selecting the agent from the associated agent group. 2
- 1 9. The method as in claim 8 wherein the step of establishing an call path between the user\and an agent of the associated agent 2 group based upon activation\of a audio-access icon further 3 comprises transferring an Internet address of the selected agent to the user.
 - The method as in claim 8 wherein the step of establishing an 10. call path between the user and an agent of the associated agent group based upon activation of a audio-access icon further comprises transferring an Internet address of the user to the selected agent.
- 1 The method as in claim 1 further comprising collecting information from the user by a web site controller. 2
- 1 12. The method as in claim 11 wherein the step of collecting
- 2 information from the user further comprises the web site
- 3 controller decoding a web access request to recover a user
- Internet address. 4

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- 1 13. The method as in claim 11 wherein the step of collecting
- 2 information from the user further comprises the web site
- 3 controller opening a web page information entry window for
- 4 receipt of information from the user.
- 1 14. The method as in claim 13 wherein the step of collecting
- 2 information from the user further comprises receiving a credit
- 3 card number from the user through the web page information entry
- 4 window.

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- The method as in claim 11 further comprising transferring
 the collected information and an identifier of the selected agent
 to a database of the web site and plurality of agent groups.
 - 16. The method as in claim 15 further comprising retrieving customer records of the user from the database.
 - 17. The method as in claim 16 further comprising displaying the customer records at a terminal of the selected agent.
 - 18. A method of servicing an inquiry from a user through the Internet, such method comprising the steps of:

proving a web site with a plurality of audio access icons; associating an agent group with a subject matter of each audio-access icon of each of the at least some web pages; and

providing an call path between the user and an agent of the associated agent group based upon activation of a audio-access icon.

- 1 19. A method of servicing an inquiry from a user through the
- 2 Internet, such method comprising the steps of:

proving a web site with a plurality of web pages for access by the user;

providing a audio-access icon on at least some web pages of the web site;

associating an agent group with a subject matter of each audio-access icon of each of the at least some web pages; and

providing an call bath between the user and an agent of the associated agent group based upon activation of a audio-access icon.

20. Apparatus for establishing an audio call path between an Internet user accessing a web site and an agent of the web site, such apparatus comprising:

means for proving a web site with a plurality of audio access icons and a plurality of agent groups;

means for associating an agent group of the plurality of agent groups with a subject matter of each audio-access icon of the web site; and

means for establishing a call path between the user and an agent of the associated agent group based upon activation of a audio-access icon by the user.

- 21. The apparatus as in claim 20 further comprising means for providing a plurality of informational web pages for access by the user.
- 1 22. The apparatus as in claim 21 further comprising means for
- disposing an audio access icon of the plurality of audio access
- 3 icons on at least some web pages of the plurality of
- 4 informational web pages.

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The method as in claim 22 wherein the means for associating an agent group with each icon further comprises means for correlating a training level of an agent group of the plurality of agent groups with an information content of an audio-access icon of the at least some web pages.

- 24. The apparatus as in claim wherein the means for establishing an call path between the user and an agent of the associated agent group based upon activation of a audio-access icon further comprises means for placing the user in a call queue of the associated group until a next available agent becomes available.
 - 25. The apparatus as in claim 24 further comprising means for measuring a time period that the user has been in the call queue.

The apparatus as in claim 25 further comprising means for comparing the measured time with a threshold value and overflowing the user to a queue of another agent group when the measured time exceeds the threshold.

- 27. The apparatus as in claim 19 further comprising means for selecting the agent from the associated agent group.
- 1 28. The apparatus as in claim\27 wherein the means for
- 2 establishing an call path between the user and an agent of the
- associated agent group based upon activation of a audio-access
- 4 icon further comprises means for transferring an Internet address
- of the selected agent to the user.

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- 1 29. The apparatus as in claim 27 wherein the means for
- 2 establishing an call path between the user and an agent of the

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associated agent group based upon activation of a audio-access icon further comprises means for transferring an Internet address of the user to the selected agent.

30. The apparatus as in claim 19 further comprising means for collecting information from the user by a web site controller.

- 1 31. The apparatus as in claim 30 wherein the means for
- 2 collecting information from the user further comprises means
- 3 within the web site controller for decoding a web access request
- 4 to recover a user Internet address.
 - 32. The apparatus as in claim 30 wherein the means for collecting information from the user further comprises means within the web site controller for opening a web page information entry window for receipt of information from the user.
 - 33. The apparatus as in claim 32 wherein the means for collecting information from the user further comprises means for receiving a credit card number from the user through the web page information entry window.

The apparatus as in claim 30 further comprising means for transferring the collected information and an identifier of the selected agent to a database of the web site and plurality of agent groups.

1 35. The apparatus as in claim 34 further comprising means for retrieving customer records of the user from the database.

1 36. The apparatus as in claim 35 further comprising means for

displaying the customer records at a terminal of the selected

3 agent.

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37. Apparatus for establishing an audio call path between an
Internet user accessing a web site and an agent of the web site,
such apparatus comprising:

a web site with a plurality of audio access icons and a plurality of agent groups;

a call distribution controller operably coupled to the web site which associates an agent group of the plurality of agent groups with a subject matter of each audio-access icon of the web site; and

a local area network which establishes a call path between the user and an agent of the associated agent group based upon activation of a audio-access icon by the user.

- 38. The apparatus as in claim 37 further comprising a web site controller which provides a plurality of informational web pages for access by the user.
- 39. The apparatus as in claim 38 further comprising a display controller coupled to the web site controller which disposes an audio access icon of the plurality of audio access icons on at least some web pages of the plurality of informational web pages.
- 1 40. The apparatus as in claim 39 further comprising a display
- 2 look-up table in a memory of the web site controller which
- 3 relates an information content of each web page of the at least
- 4 some web pages with the audio-access icon disposed on the web
- 5 page.

- 1 41. The method as in claim 40 wherein the call distribution
- 2 controller which associates an agent group with each icon further
- 3 comprises a call distribution look-up table which correlates a
- 4 training level of an agent group of the plurality of agent groups.
- 5 with an information content of an audio-access icon of the at
- 6 least some web pages.
- 1 42. The apparatus as in claim 37 wherein the local area network
- 2 which establishes an call path between the user and an agent of
- 3 the associated agent group based upon activation of a audio-
- 4 access icon further comprises a setup controller which places the
- 5 user in a call queue of the associated group until a next
- 6 available agent becomes available.
 - 43. The apparatus as in claim 42 further comprising a timer within the call distribution controller which measures a time period that the user has been in the call queue.
 - 44. The apparatus as in claim 43 further comprising a comparator within the call distribution controller which compares the measured time with a threshold value and which overflows the user to a queue of another agent group when the measured time exceeds the threshold.
- 1 45. The apparatus as in claim 37 further comprising an agent
- 2 activity controller which selects the agent from the associated
- 3 agent group.

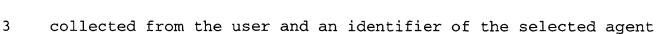
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- 1 46. The apparatus as in claim 45 wherein the local area network
- which establishes an call path between the user and an agent of
- 3 the associated agent group based upon activation of a audio-
- 4 access icon further comprises an agent transfer controller

- 5 coupled to the call distribution controller which transfers an
- 6 Internet address of the selected agent to the user.
- 1 47. The apparatus as in claim 46 wherein the local area network
- 2 which establishes an call path between the user and an agent of
- 3 the associated agent group based upon activation of a audio-
- 4 access icon further comprises a user transfer controller which
- 5 transfers an Internet address of the user to the selected agent.
- 1 The apparatus as in claim 37 further comprising an
- interrogation processor which collects user information. 2
- 1 49. The apparatus as in claim 48 wherein the interrogation processor further comprises a packet decoder which decodes web site access requests to recover a user Internet address.
 - 50. The apparatus as in claim 49 wherein the interrogation processor further comprises an entry window processor coupled to the web site controller for opening a web page information entry window for receipt of information from the user.
 - The apparatus as in claim 50 wherein the interrogation processor further comprises a memory coupled to the interrogation processor which stores information received from the user through the web page information entry window.
- 1 52. The apparatus as in claim 51 further comprising a database
- 2 coupled to the call distribution processor for storing customer
- 3 records.

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- 1 53. The apparatus as in claim 52 further comprising a
- 2 communications processor which transfers the information



- 4 to a database of the web site.
- 1 54. The apparatus as in claim 53 further comprising a database
- 2 processor coupled to the database which retrieves customer
- 3 records of the user from the database based upon the information
- 4 collected from the user and transferred to the database.
- 1 55. The apparatus as in claim 54 further comprising an agent
- 2 terminal which displays the customer records to the selected
- 3 agent.

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